

A Farewell to Dr. Beth Wee: Celebrating a Legacy of Leadership, Mentorship, and Heart at Tulane SSE

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After 37 years at Tulane University, Dr. Beth Wee is officially retiring, though “retiring” might be too final a word for someone whose commitment to her students, colleagues, and community is so deeply ingrained. Over nearly four decades of service, including her role as Associate Dean in the School of Science and Engineering, Dr. Wee has left a legacy that will resonate in the halls of Tulane for

years to come.

Dr. Wee first arrived at Tulane in 1988 with a postdoctoral research grant, having moved to New Orleans when her husband accepted a faculty position at Loyola University. What began as a temporary step quickly evolved into a lifelong vocation. “I’ve been at Tulane for 37 years,” she said. “And I’ve been in SSE since it started in 2006.”

One of her most significant contributions was co-founding the undergraduate neuroscience major alongside Dr. Gary Dohanich and Dr. Jeff Tasker in 2000. At the time, it was an experimental offering—just one student graduated in that inaugural class. Today, neuroscience is one of the most popular and fastest-growing programs in SSE, graduating over 100 students annually. “We had our 25th anniversary of the neuroscience major,” Dr. Wee shared. “[I’m] very proud of how that neuroscience major has done in terms of getting students to major in neuroscience, to find internships, to find jobs, to go on to graduate school, and medical school, and all the things you can do with a neuroscience degree!”

When SSE was formed in 2006 as part of Tulane’s post-Katrina restructuring, Dr. Wee’s leadership and institutional knowledge made her a natural fit. She officially became Associate Dean in 2009, first as an interim appointment and later became permanent.

In that role, she has become well known across the university not just for her administrative leadership, but for her relentless dedication to helping students succeed. “Making sure that students get good advising, that they get good career advice—I mean, that’s been something I’ve tried to do,” she said. “Many students say, ‘Hey, I got your email... and that’s how I got my internship, or that’s how I got my job, or that’s how I got into a research lab!’ And so I’m proud of that from my Associate Dean perspective.”

Indeed, Dr. Wee’s inbox has long been a source of opportunity for students, filled with internship leads, research openings, and encouragement. She’s known for her

practical, but warm, solutions-first approach to advising and her ability to navigate even the most complex degree plans. “Sometimes it's problem solving—sometimes a student that wants to graduate in a year... Funny how they need a bunch of classes! And can we figure out how they can meet the requirements? That's part of the fun too.”

Her influence, however, extends well beyond the academic realm. A passionate advocate for experiential learning, Dr. Wee has spent years working to expand global education opportunities for science and engineering students. “I think there was this sense that that if you were in science and engineering, that you couldn't study abroad,” she said. Dr. Wee worked hard to change that, however. Through her support and direct involvement, numerous students have studied neuroscience abroad in cities like Stockholm and Copenhagen—sometimes with Dr. Wee herself as their instructor. “I taught for six different summers,” she recalled. “When I took students to do study abroad programs, those were great opportunities, because I really got to know the students... The underlying thing that the students didn't get, but I certainly got from having done it before, was how well they would connect with the faculty that went—to the point that when we'd see the students on campus in the fall, they were like, ‘Oh, it's my best friend!’”

She also emphasized the importance of empathy and community throughout her career, often describing Tulane as a “collaborative” and “caring” place—qualities that were especially important during difficult periods like Hurricane Katrina and the COVID-19 pandemic. “COVID and Katrina were probably the two big things that stand out as times where everybody was wiggled out, everybody was worrying about their own families and their own safety and their own health, but they also knew that we needed to get Tulane back up to speed,” she reflects.

When asked about her most meaningful memories, Dr. Wee quickly pointed to the connections she's made with students and colleagues. “When students come back and they still want to stay in touch, that's kind of cool because that means that they really got something out of the program. It wasn't just ‘I was checking off boxes and then I graduated,’ I think they really felt a connection to the program.”

Her generosity of spirit has also extended globally. In addition to international teaching, Dr. Wee once traveled to Pakistan as part of a U.S. State Department-sponsored service-learning trip in partnership with a women's university in Islamabad. "We bonded with some of our Pakistani [colleagues]... and we formed friendships," she said. "And that's how if we're ever going to have peace in the world, it's going to be these friendships of [people] getting to know each other..."

As she looks ahead to the next chapter, Dr. Wee has no plans to slow down. In the immediate future, she'll continue supporting the neuroscience program through a brief transitional period, but she's also looking forward to more time for travel, reading, music, and giving back. She's especially excited to volunteer with local organizations like Glass Half Full, Second Harvest Food Bank, and possibly even literacy programs. "I always thought that I'd like to teach people to read," she said. "There's so much of a need for people to volunteer."

She also has a few musical instruments at home that she's excited to dust off and return to, and of course, she's eager to explore both New Orleans and the wider world. "As long as my knees and back hold out, I'm going to keep walking and traveling," she laughed.

When asked what advice she'd give to students or early-career faculty, her answer was simple but powerful: "If in doubt, do the friendliest thing. That has helped me many times. [If] you're hesitating. Should I do it? Should I not do it? What's the friendliest thing to do?... That is how I've tried to live."

Dr. Beth Wee has spent her career embodying that ethos. Through her leadership, compassion, and tireless support of students and faculty alike, she has shaped generations of Tulanians and strengthened the foundation of SSE in lasting ways. We wish her all the best in retirement, and we know she won't be far from the Tulane community she helped build.